

INVESTIGATION OF LEPROSY.

APRIL 28, 1898.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. CORLISS, from the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 5431.]

The Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 5431) for the investigation of leprosy, have carefully considered the same.

The importance of the proposed legislation is shown by communications from the Supervising Surgeon-General of the Marine-Hospital Service. On January 13, 1898, in a communication with reference to the proposed measure, he stated:

With regard to authorizing the Surgeon-General of the Marine-Hospital Service to cause an investigation to be made relative to the origin and prevalence of leprosy in the United States, I have to state that in view of the fact that leprosy is known to exist in quite a number of places in this country there is a prevailing opinion among the sanitary authorities that there are many more of these cases than have been recorded. Moreover, there has been a confusion of ideas about the danger of its spread. In one locality the disease is reported to be slowly spreading, and each year there are noted fresh foci of the disease, while, on the other hand, the reported isolated cases are a subject of discussion as to whether they are a menace.

So far there has been no systematic inquiry made with regard to the origin and prevalence of the disease in the United States. Some valuable reports have been made of the prevalence and behavior of this disease in one or two localities. Further than this the information is imperfect and fragmentary.

That the disease is contagious no one at present will deny. The International Leprosy Conference, which met in Berlin in October last, declared that the disease is not only contagious, but when introduced into a country the history shows that it invariably spreads, each case forming a nidus of infection, and sooner or later other cases followed. This fact has been recognized by a few of the State and local authorities where there have been a considerable number of cases, and restrictive measures are now enforced to prevent its further spread. In many places from which isolated cases have been reported no such measures have been generally practiced. The Marine-Hospital Service has been notified of the existence of such cases and has been requested to assume charge of them, and when it was ascertained that there was no law for such procedure these cases have been turned adrift to go wherever they pleased.

In this connection I would state that it is believed that there are many more cases of leprosy in the United States than are actually known. Recent investigation and study of the disease have demonstrated that there are quite a number of obscure

forms of nervous and skin diseases heretofore considered as separate and distinct which are nothing more or less than leprosy.

Before any rational measures can be undertaken by the National Government, if such a conclusion is justifiable, it will be necessary to inquire further into the origin and prevalence of the disease, and to determine just how far it is a menace to our people.

The expenses of such an inquiry would be small; a sum sufficient to meet the expenses of travel of the officers detailed to this duty would be all that is required. This could be properly paid from the fund for the prevention of epidemic diseases.

The bill meets with approval, and I would respectfully recommend that favorable action be taken thereon.

The Surgeon-General further states, in a communication on April 16, 1898, as follows:

It would be impossible to determine accurately the number of cases of leprosy in the United States, unless it be by a systematic and thorough investigation. From reports received from health officers and other sources, it is known to exist in the States of Washington, California, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina, Minnesota, the Dakotas, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. The reports concerning the prevalence of this disease in the above-mentioned States are fragmentary at the best. No accurate information is on file in any of the Departments with regard to the exact number of cases in the United States.

It is believed that if a careful investigation were undertaken many more cases would be found than are supposed to exist. It is believed that the investigation can not be completed before December 1 next, as many parts of the United States have to be visited by the officers detailed for this purpose, and can not be done by obtaining reports from the health officers of the several States or municipalities.

Your committee recommend an amendment by striking out the word "upon," in line 7, and inserting "on or before December first next," and with this amendment recommend that the bill do pass.